

VZCZCXRO0209
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0978/01 0791350
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 201350Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0281
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000978

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/17/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ASSYRIAN PATRIOTIC PARTY WANTS HOMELAND

REF: A. A) KIRKUK 004
[1](#)B. B) BAGHDAD 559

Classified By: PRT LEADER JIM BIGUS FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: IPAO recently met with three members of the Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP), to discuss the Party's program, especially their proposal for an Assyrian Homeland in Ninewa Province. One APP rep said the Party differs in "all subjects" from the larger Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), and said the APP is more willing to form alliances with a wide range of other parties. The APP is satisfied with Article 140's progress and expects it to help correct the ethnic situation in Ninewa, where a large Assyrian population lives. The APP wants an "Assyrian Homeland" that provides for autonomous rule and is linked to the KRG. Assyrian Christians would only be truly safe, they said, under a democratic secular government such as that in Kurdistan. They have received an especially positive reception, they said, from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). The APP reps say that their homeland would protect the rights of all minorities in the area, including Yezidis and other minorities, and would include non-contiguous villages and towns within the existing KRG, which would give these communities autonomous status and "guarantees" of their rights. The APP proposal mirrors Kurdish proposals described in REFTEL to annex portions of Ninewa Province to the KRG. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND ON THE ASSYRIAN PATRIOTIC PARTY

[1](#)2. (SBU) IPAO met with members of the Assyrian Patriotic Party (APP) leadership, including Manuel Khoshaba from the APP's Irbil office, Mary Hashim an Assyrian-American, and Albert Geiso who is the APP's Kirkuk director. Manuel described the origins of the APP, saying that after its founding in 1973, it spent its early years as an underground organization in Baghdad. Later, it became more focused on the Assyrian expatriate community with headquarters moved in the 1990s to the Kurdistan autonomous region. In 2003, the APP became a formal political party and became a player in Iraqi politics. The party has one member in the Ninewa Provincial Council and one, Sylvana Bouya Nasir, in the Kirkuk Provincial Council. In the KRG, an APP member is the Minister of Tourism, but the party holds no seats in the KRG Assembly. Manuel said that the APP's general program calls for changes in the Iraqi Constitution, specifically guarantees of Assyrian rights, the right to "autonomous governing," and additional guarantees of Women's Rights.

DIFFERENCES WITH ASSYRIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

[1](#)3. (SBU) Khoshaba noted that the APP "differed in all subjects" from the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) (For information on ADM see refTel A)the . Manuel claimed that the APP "stands in the middle of everything"8 and can make a partnership with Kurds, Arabs or Turkomans. "We accept the

others and we talk with others," said Manuel, adding that the ADM "doesn't do this." The ADM, he said, "talks one way" with you PRTreps but "a different way with Iraqis." Manuel stated that the APP can build partnerships with "all parties in Iraq, but we need friends."

SUPPORT FOR ARTICLE 140 PROCESS AS WAY TO ADDRESS PAST WRONGS

14. (SBU) Concerning Article 140, Manuel said that the APP views it as a "constitutional process, approved by a referendum of the people." In addressing the Arabization Program, Manuel asserted that it must be addressed, but noted "it will take time", to reverse these mistakes. When asked whether the APP believes the Article 140 process is moving in the right direction, Manuel responded that in terms of normalization, the current steps are correct and will help to correct the situation in "our part of the country," (the Ninewa Plains) where a large concentration of Assyrians live. He said that this area has the same issues as Kirkuk, specifically various types of displaced people and property claims.

ASSYRIAN HOMELAND LINKED TO KRG

15. (C) Manuel was asked about the proposal for an "Assyrian Homeland" and what it would constitute. Because Assyrians occupy a unique position as a small Christian group in an overwhelmingly Muslim country, he said, only a secular society would be "supportive for us." This sort of "democratic secular picture" is present in Kurdistan, he said. He emphasized the Assyrian demand that those areas of the Ninewa plains that are predominantly Assyrian be linked

BAGHDAD 00000978 002 OF 003

to Kurdistan. Five Assyrian political groups have endorsed this program, he said, and its details have been sent to the US Secretary of State. Until now, however, he noted, "we haven't heard from anyone other than the Kurds about creating an autonomous area or homeland." This link of the Assyrian plains to Kurdistan "would give us a chance to be ourselves and protect our rights."

16. (C) Manuel said that the "five-sided agreement" submitted to the Secretary of State was signed by the APP, the Chaldean Cultural Community, the Chaldean-Assyrian Organization, the Democratic Party, and the "Democratic Chaldean Stage." The proposal had been discussed with the Kurds: officially with the Kurdistan Democratic Party leadership, and unofficially with the PUK and the Kurdistan Communist Party. Manuel noted that the APP has received considerable encouragement from the KDP concerning the homeland proposal, but there was still "no official plan." He added that they hope to meet with Barzani soon to further discuss the matter.

17. (C) Concerning the Ninewa portion of this "Homeland," Manuel said that this would be an area east of the Tigris River currently constituting two districts with villages and agricultural land controlled by Assyrians. Other parts of what would become the Assyrian Homeland are various villages and smaller areas in the KRG. These, however, he said, are not geographically contiguous. The APP is not asking, he said, for complete control of the Assyrian villages currently in the KRG, but wants guarantees concerning respect for Assyrian traditions and other specific rights.

18. (C) Asked if creation of the Ninewa Homeland would mean seceding from Ninewa Province, Manuel responded that Iraqi Constitution provides for autonomous governing for certain ethnic groups. The APP would like to see a new administrative system for local government that would provide autonomy for the Assyrians and other such groups. He again stressed the need to "link" to Kurdistan because the "the religious political parties" that dominate the rest of Iraq

will not guarantee Assyrian rights like Kurdistan will.

NUMBERS OF ASSYRIANS

¶9. (SBU) Manuel described the Assyrian community in Iraq as about 500,000 people, of whom just 6000 to 7000 are in Kirkuk. He noted that as many as 5000 Assyrian families have settled in Ninewa Province in the last year (NOTE: Representatives of the Assyrian Democratic Movement have given us a similar figure, see REFTEL A. END NOTE), and, he added, "we believe that our people in neighboring countries would return here" if an Assyrian homeland was established.

HOW TO ESTABLISH A "HOMELAND"

¶10. (C) Manuel was asked about whether the creation of this homeland would come under the aegis of the Article 140 boundary adjustment process. He did not give a clear answer, only noting that no matter how the Homeland was established, it would require "discussions" with and an okay from the GOI to attach the Ninewa districts to the KRG. He added that it would also be necessary to convince the Kurds to allow these districts to "associate" with the KRG. (NOTE: Baghdad 559 indicates that the Kurds may not take much convincing. This program seems to be part of) or plays into) a KDP program to expand the KRG's borders. END NOTE). Manuel noted that the people to be included in the Homeland area, even where they are not Assyrians, are non-Arabs, "more than 90 percent." "Our plan," he said, "can be called a proposal giving rights to all minorities in the area, including Yezidis" (NOTE: there may be problems convincing Yezidis that association with the KRG is in their best interests. See REFTEL B. END NOTE).

¶11. (C) Asked if the Ninewa Provincial government would cooperate with the Homeland proposal, Manuel said that the APP had not yet officially submitted this plan to the Ninewa authorities. They have had unofficial discussions with the Ninewa PC and, he claimed, the APP had presented the concept to the Department of State in Washington (apparently through Assyrian expatriates).

MORE DIFFERENCES WITH THE ADM

¶12. (C) Manuel criticized the Assyrian Democratic Movement's position on the homeland proposal, saying that the ADM was not interested in the homeland proposal and wanted to maintain the status quo, with strong links to the GOI in Baghdad. The ADM, said Manuel, "reflects abnormal political ideas" supported by "other" political parties.8 Manuel

BAGHDAD 00000978 003 OF 003

accused the ADM's leader and Council of Representatives member, Yonadam Kanna, of links with Baathist intelligence services and alluded to questionable aspects of ADM's financing.

APP AND KIRKUK PC

¶13. (SBU) Asked about the APP's role in Kirkuk, Manuel said that their representative on the PC, Sylvana Nasir, was elected under the auspices of the Kirkuk Brotherhood List, the Kurdish-affiliated list, in the last election. This was, he said, the only way that the APP could get a representative on the Council in an election that was dominated by ethnic politics.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: Manuel, the head of the APP's Irbil office, dominated the meeting. Given that the meeting's two other attendees, Hashim and Geiso, represent the APP's Kirkuk branch, this perhaps indicates the Kurdocentric position of this party and its minimal role in Kirkuk. There appears to

be a clear difference in the position of the APP, and the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), with the ADM showing little apparent interest in the idea of a homeland linked with Kurdistan. The APP's description of its Assyrian/Ninewa proposals is in some ways a mirror image of the KRG expansion moves in Ninewa outlined in REFTEL (B). It seems likely that the relationship between the APP and the Kurds, especially with the KDP, is closely than what Khoshaba described to us. END COMMENT.

KHALILZAD